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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: FIRST PHASE OF VOTER REGISTRATION WRAPS UP WELL

REF: A. KABUL 1701
[B](#). KABUL 2914
[C](#). KABUL 2708

[1](#)1. (SBU) Phase 1 of the voter registration update for the 14 central highland provinces reached its official end date on November 5 with 828,708 voters -- and counting -- added to the rolls (REF A). Nuristan province and selected districts in Ghazni, Wardak, and Logar will remain open until mid-November to compensate for days lost to security problems and logistical delays (REF B). Outlying areas are still transmitting data to the Kabul headquarters of the Independent Election Commission (IEC), but IEC Chief Technical Officer Daoud Ali Najafi expects that Phase 1 will wrap up with some 900,000 new voters registered. IEC staff opened 257 of the planned 260 Phase 1 sites. The IEC publicly acknowledged that registration could not proceed in three districts (two in Ghazni, one in Wardak) and explained alternative methods to allow these voters to register.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Phase 1 was remarkably free of violence despite Taliban threats against officials, sites, and voters. No citizens or IEC staff were killed during Phase 1 -- an accomplishment that the IEC counts as one of its successes, and a credit to the Afghan security forces. A mortar round landed near a voter registration site in the Rashidan district center in Ghanzi, but it is unclear whether the voter registration site was the target. As reported REF C, "local Taliban" burned voter registration materials en route to Nuristan province.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The fledgling IEC substantially met the challenges of starting up operations in remote and difficult terrain where roads are few, internet connections are rare, phone service is intermittent, and armed opposition groups are active. In less than three months, the Commission hired and trained more than 2,500 staff; procured forms, computers, furniture, and satellite phones; designed and published billboards and radio spots; and distributed materials by plane, helicopter, jingle truck, horse, and donkey. The IEC is expanding its public outreach efforts beyond modern media, including staging on November 2 a successful and highly-publicized national meeting of mullahs who pronounced that voting is an Islamic privilege and obligation, and that women should be encouraged to participate. The IEC developed an effective working relationship with UNDP ELECT and other donor technical advisors -- an international cadre now one-fifth the size of that on the ground in 2005 -- and retained a strong leadership role in key decisions. Field staff in particular demonstrated commitment and initiative, facing down Taliban death threats and solving everyday problems with the resources to hand.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Afghan voters in the Phase 1 provinces appear

eager to participate in the democratic process. In Kunar province, for example, more than 97,000 new voters registered, adding about half again as many voters to the 191,374 who enrolled in the baseline registration exercise in 2004. Thirty-eight percent of new voters thus far are women, a figure that compares favorably with 41 percent in the previous electoral cycle. Local elders in many communities offered IEC workers their own security guarantees to facilitate registration in remote areas. In Parwan province, where IEC staff shared only one vehicle, community leaders volunteered to transport election workers so that more communities could register.

4. (U) The 14 Phase 1 provinces are Ghor, Dai Kundi, Bamyan, Wardak, Panjsher, Kapisa, Badakhshan, Takhar, Ghazni, Nuristan, Kunar, Sar-i-Pul and Logar.
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